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# HOWARD MARKLEIN

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STATE SENATOR • 17<sup>TH</sup> SENATE DISTRICT

## **Capitol Update By Senator Howard Marklein September 25, 2015**

### ***Wine Walks Legislation Demonstrates the Strength of Grassroots***

Over the past decade, communities in Southwest and South Central Wisconsin have promoted businesses in their area by sponsoring events called Wine or Beer Walks. During these events, pre-registered guests are welcomed into a wide variety of participating businesses to sample wines and beers while they meet the business owner and “shop” their business. These events are usually sponsored by a chamber of commerce or downtown business association to encourage local residents to explore businesses they wouldn’t otherwise know, create a fun community event and fundraise for local programming year round.

While the concept of these events may seem simple and straightforward, the Department of Revenue (DOR) recently clarified that Wine Walks are illegal because current law does not allow a municipality to issue licenses in number, location and manner in which the events are currently held.

A dedicated group of business owners, municipal official and community leaders collaborated with my office and Representative Keith Ripp’s (R-Lodi) office to draft a bill that adjusts current law to create a framework for Wine Walks to continue throughout our state.

In order to legalize these important events, SB 236 and AB 320 proposed to change existing law to allow local Chambers and business groups to obtain temporary licenses for a set number of locations during a specified time to create a Wine Walk. Each location will be required to have a licensed operator on site and comply with other alcohol service rules and regulations. In reality, we are simply legalizing the way that these events have successfully operated for many years without incident.

To confirm the local impact beyond the businesses involved, I contacted Reedsburg Police Chief Tim Becker to discuss whether the Reedsburg Wine Walk or Barley Walk created any law enforcement challenges. Chief Becker assured me that the way the Reedsburg Revitalization Organization has conducted the event in the past was well done and participants followed the rules of the event.

The groups organizing Wine and Beer Walks have a vested interest in following a safe, legal framework for these events. All of the communities that have held Wine and Beer Walk events have shared the profound impact on local business exposure and fundraising efforts that help our downtown communities thrive. Bekah Stelling of Bekah Kate’s in Baraboo summarized the impact during her testimony before the Senate Committee on Revenue, Financial Institutions & Rural Issues. She said, “How many other marketing investments can we make as a business that guarantee that 500 people are going to walk into our store on a given day?”

Jim Murphy from WRJC in Mauston also testified at the hearing and recalled the excitement and energy during their first Wine Walk. “Downtown Mauston was full of people on a Friday night!” Murphy said. “There was a different feel to our community. People dressed up, made a night of it and went into businesses they had never explored before! One business owner sent me a text the next day with dollar signs in it. That said it all.”

I am honored to be a part of a solution to continue these important events. These bills are a great example of the strength of grassroots efforts in the legislative process. Local businesses connected with others around the state to bring this issue to our attention and proposed a solution. Their support and encouragement throughout the process was an important reason why these bills moved through the legislature efficiently.

The Senate and the Assembly passed Senate Bill (SB) 236 and Assembly Bill (AB) 320 over the last two weeks and these bills now await Governor Scott Walker’s signature. It is our hope that the Governor will sign these bills very soon so that our communities may move forward with planning Wine Walks this fall.

For more information and to connect with me, visit my website <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/senate/17/marklein> and subscribe to my weekly E-Update by sending an email to [Sen.Marklein@legis.wisconsin.gov](mailto:Sen.Marklein@legis.wisconsin.gov). Do not hesitate to call 800-978-8008 if you have input, ideas or need assistance with any state-related matters.

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